

Written by Patricia Turnier

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[Pierre Gage](#), of both Jamaican and Haitian origins, was born on January 3rd 1977 in Montreal. In high school, he passed an audition for an amateur version of Starmania, where the acclaimed author of the Luc Plamondon show noticed him. He there obtained the role of Johnny Roquefort. This experience allowed him to discover his talent for singing. He later met Corneille and Gardy Martin, who were part of the group O.N.E., while studying theatre at Concordia University. And so began Gage's career. His participation with O.N.E. lasted three years, during which the track Zoukin ranked Number One on the charts across Canada, and helped him establish a good reputation among Soul and World Music lovers. In addition, O.N.E. opened for prominent singers such as Isabelle Boulay and Kelis (Virgin USA). The group later separated since each member wanted to pursue a solo career. Corneille became hugely popular in France and Gage sang by his side at the Paris Casino. He later opened for Corneille during his Quebec and European tours, totalling over 40 concerts. In 2004, Gage released his first single, entitled "Trop fresh" ("Too Fresh") and managed to reach an even larger audience. In 2005, his album entitled "Soul Rebel", produced entirely by Corneille, was released on the market. Titles such as "Pense à moi" ("Think of Me") and "Je t'aime quand même" ("I Still Love You") were well received by the media and the public alike. The CD "Soul Rebel" also seduced the French public, where it went gold with over 150 000 copies sold. Gage is considered, among others, as a pioneer of French reggae and thus redefined this musical style within the Francophone music world. One can actually notice the reggae flavour in certain tracks such as "Demain" ("Tomorrow"). On June 30, 2008, Gage launched his second album, entitled "Changer le monde" ("Change the World"). Personal topics such as the absence of his father, love and break-ups are highlighted. The single "Tu peux choisir" ("You Can Choose") was one of the hit singles of last summer. It is also important to mention that this artist produced eye-catching videos from these two albums. In the fall of 2008, [Gage](#) began

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touring in France. In concert, he demonstrates excellent charisma. He has beautiful stage presence and a way of communicating with his audience. Over the course of his career, he performed in prestigious venues such as the Bataclan and the Zénith in Paris. In Montreal, he performed at the FrancoFolies festival and at Club Soda. We met this trilingual artist last spring in Montreal. Over the course of the interview, we discovered an artist who gave generously of himself, who is comfortable with his dual cultural heritage and who strives to look ahead.

Interview conducted by Patricia Turnier, LL.M (Master's degree in Law), Editor-In-Chief (editor@megadiversities.com).

Translated from French by Murielle Swift, BSc., MEd.

P.T. When did your passion for music begin?

G. It all started when I was five years old. I come from a single-parent family, growing up with my mother and my sisters. I was surrounded by women and music was always part of our lives. Because of this, I was practically immersed in it. During my childhood, we often listened to French Caribbean vinyl records. I used to enjoy using a sock as a microphone and sing in front of a mirror (laughter).

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P.T. Tell us about the musical giants who profoundly inspired you, such as Marvin Gaye, Steve Wonder (the Black artist awarded the most Grammys), and Michael Jackson.

G. These productive artists, with such fertile spirits, had legendary careers, which continue for those who are still alive. I love the tracks by Marvin Gaye such as "Distant Lover" and "Sexual Healing". The Soul spirit and the charisma this man gave off were extraordinary. I also loved his gentleman side. Marvin Gaye was always well dressed. Prince is another artist I enjoy. He is a musical genius; he plays 27 instruments! The Purple Rain era influenced me, as well as Thriller which became a classic. At the time, I would imitate Michael Jackson with his gloves in front of a mirror (laughter). I would take on a different personality since during that particular time in my life I was very shy, especially around girls (laughter). These singers definitely represent legends to me and established high standards which all new artists strive for. Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder and Michael Jackson passed down songs which speak to other generations and those to come. They created classics, which reveal their genius and undeniable quality. Their chiselled tracks demonstrate an incredibly evocative power, where one can notice various overlapping currents. They have become references with their talents of instrumentalist, author, composer and interpreter.

P.T. How has your triple cultural identity (Haitian, Jamaican and Québécois) influenced your music?

G. As a Québécois, I am exposed to two cultures, which allows me to be more open to the world. This particular vision is an advantage to my music. The mix of ethnicities I possess gives me the opportunity to cross over to other cultures. I enjoy displaying this cultural mosaic, which is part of my heritage. I am a fan of all that is eclectic and I refuse to be labelled.

I consider myself to have a critical view of the world and I embrace "otherness". It is important for me that my mixed cultural heritage be reflected in my tracks. Music has the power to transmit universal emotions; it breaks down barriers and brings people together. My hybrid journey gives me a wider inspiration and allows me to reach a united public.

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P.T. We can distinguish your Jamaican culture in your music, particularly in singles such as "Demain" ("Tomorrow"), "Je t'aime quand même" ("I Still Love You") and "Te Quiero" ("I Love You"). You introduce a reggae beat which is very innovative in the French [music](#) scene. We know you were highly influenced by Bob Marley. What does reggae mean to you?

G. Bob Marley was the reggae music icon. He conveyed important messages. His music was engaging and spiritual. He was able to stimulate social critics by using remarkable idioms. This artist produced powerful albums during the 1970s, such as "Catch a Fire", "Natty Dread" and "Exodus", or such distinguished tracks such as "No Woman No Cry" and "One Love". For me, reggae is a musical style which allows us to truly demonstrate who we are. In other words, this musical style reflects an authenticity. Reggae also represents the sun and warms people's hearts. This is why I enjoy using this style to touch individuals and make them move. It is also important for me to fuse with other musical styles such as zouk, Haitian kompa and Soul because I want to reach everyone, especially when I'm on stage. I enjoy highlighting the blending of various musical styles. I also really enjoy having others discover my diverse background. Travelling gives me the opportunity to reach many people and develop a more open mind. I believe it is essential to uncover one's roots. Certain artists, such as Wyclef Jean, understood this. We have to be real. In my first track, "Pense à moi" ("Think of Me"), we hear my Creole roots. I also like to contribute to the Francophone world through my songs. In my opinion, Soul has not yet been fully exploited in the French music scene.

P.T. The opus "Viens me voir" ("Come See Me") from your first album is very touching. Can you tell us more about it?

G. It talks about the history of my life, especially concerning my father. For several years, I was unsure of who I really was. It is difficult to have a well-rooted identity without the contact of a father. At first, I was ashamed to tell people I had no father. I felt different from the others. The song "Viens me voir" ("Come See Me") helped me externalise what I felt about that situation. I wanted to share with the public this episode of my life. The opus of my second album, "T'étais où" ("Where Were You") is about a man speaking to his father. My first album was about a boy speaking to his father. My mother was always there for me in life and I believe in her. She always supported me and is a very important person to me. I am blessed to have her in my life; she is extraordinary. She taught me a lot: respect for others and the importance of working by setting precise objectives and taking measures to accomplish them, among other things. She is an important guide to me. It is such a blessing to have a mother like her. Coming back to my tracks, I like mentioning my past and my present in my music. It is important to me to concentrate on life questions and my inner spirit which I choose to share with my audience.

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P.T. Your second album demonstrated greater maturity with your social and ecological conscience, with philanthropic undertones. Could you please share with us the main messages you wished to transmit through this album?

G. I am currently in my thirties. I wanted my second album to convey social messages. The title "Changer le monde" ("Changing the World") does actually relate to philanthropy. I was making a reference to Marvin Gaye, who was particularly interested in humanitarian issues. Social conscience is a crucial theme in my singles. Change begins, in fact, with us, and I wanted to sing authentic tracks. Ecology is also an important theme for me. It is currently a hot topic, especially with everything that is happening on a global scale, and in particular with respect to greenhouse gases. We have more advanced recycling programs here than in Europe. I also wanted to deal with other important topics in my album such as family, love (for example, the song "Tu peux choisir" ("You Can Choose"), with Vitaa), friendship; in other words, human relationships. Mediocre and empty tracks should be banished, in my opinion. I want to talk about my aspirations, talk to my better half, and so on, while maintaining my Soul side.

P.T. Tell us about your track entitled "Je veux être libre" ("I Want to Be Free"). The lyrics are deeply moving and leave no one indifferent.

G. This track represents a pause in time. As artists, we need space in order to be inspired. The theme of freedom is important for me because it is not everyone who has embraced the calling of an artist. Some people will say that it would be better to choose a more stable career. But it is important for me to live off of what I love, what I am passionate about. Freedom also represents for me the ability to share one's state of mind without being influenced by external critics, whom we must be able to tune out. My music is partly autobiographical. As I already mentioned, I deal with several themes in my music, such as the absence of my father, among others. The artistic domain enables me to freely express myself. This sphere represents my passion and is an oasis for me, bringing me a sense of well-being, of hope and a joy of living. It has certainly not always been easy. I have had to make sacrifices by committing myself to music. But I do not have any regrets and what I studied serves me well today.

P.T. In the past, you have said to the media that singing is not a choice, but a necessity. Could you elaborate on that?

G. Yes, actually, I believe that one must have ideas to defend. It is important to me that the public be attached to my lyrics. The stage has allowed me to cover various subjects. I always

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make sure that my themes are not dull. I am a man of the stage who seeks to transmit essential messages. I cannot imagine that an artist could be an indifferent spectator who transmits messages lacking in substance. Aimé Césaire spoke about the importance of engagement as an artist. He said, "To be engaged signifies, for the artist, to be inserted into his social context, to be the flesh of the people, experiencing the problems of his country with intensity, and rendering witness to them." I fully support this quote. Césaire led a war in the name of his origins. His struggle went from personal to universal and I consider myself a citizen of the world. Music represents for me a universal communion which crosses borders, which is impossible to accomplish without one's heart and passion.

P.T. You were recently nominated in two categories: French Soul/ [R&B](#) artist of the year, and French album of the year, at the Soba (Soul of Blackness Awards, www.galasoba.ca) gala on March 1st, 2009. What did this mean to you?

G. I would have liked to win at the Soba awards (laughter). But seriously, I was happy, touched and honoured to receive this nomination. It was an important sign for me, one of gratitude. It encouraged me to press forward, to continue in the artistic realm while exploring other realms such as cinema.

P.T. You were also involved in theatre, which in my opinion provides an excellent foundation to becoming an actor.

G. I love studying the dynamics and the psychology of characters. Theatre and cinema allow me to do this. I like having the possibility of appropriating different personalities by playing diverse roles. Theatre and cinema give the opportunity to exploit other artistic dimensions.

P.T. Do you have other projects you would like to share with us?

G. I will be participating in the benefit concert organised by the Just for Laughs festival in Montreal at Place des Arts in order to raise funds for organisations in Quebec and Africa. I will be sharing the stage with Gregory Charles, Florence K, Linda Thalie, Stephy Sock and others. This event will take place on July 26 during the "Just to Help" telethon. I will also be participating in the musical review "Esquire Show Bar" at the Corona Theatre in Montreal during August and September.

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P.T. What advice would you give to young people who would like to pursue a career in the music industry?

G. Specifically as far as singers go, it is important that they work their voice by taking lessons. They should certainly not try to hide it behind beats. In other words, they should be able to sing a cappella. It is the best way to stand out from the pack. Mediocrity must therefore be banned. One must always strive for excellence and have the desire to surpass oneself. Artists who have had long careers such as Stevie Wonder are those who maintained high standards. In my opinion, those are the models we should follow. When we have talent, we are noticed. I actually think that it is a great advantage to be a musician. Nowadays, in popular music, we don't hear brass, violins, etc. like we used to. This gives the opportunity to create quality arrangements and build colourful repertoires. Artists must also perform in various clubs in order to be recognised. This allows them to be discovered, to develop relationships while being in touch with the public. I learned over the course of my career that we must be able to step back in order to jump forward. We have to be able to recognise and rebuild ourselves. In life, we should not be in a rush, and patience is something we can learn. We should not be impatient to accomplish things. The important thing is to be ready to seize opportunities as they present themselves. I would also add that as an artist, we cannot allow ourselves to be frugal with our time.

We must practice this profession for the right reasons and not only make money, since many are called but few are chosen. Having a passion for the art is of utmost importance. We have to be ready to give the best of ourselves in order to accomplish our dreams. There is no secret to success. Talent alone is not enough; one must work hard and have confidence in oneself.

P.T. We sometimes hear young people say that they want to become a star just to become famous, but without having a specific career in mind. They don't know whether they want to become actors, singers or something else.

G. Exactly. We cannot practice this profession just for the celebrity status; it is a calling. There is a lot of work and sacrifice involved and so we have to truly enjoy what we do. Another piece of advice I could give would be to beware of sharks in this industry. For instance, anyone can pass themselves off as an artists' agent since there is no professional order governing their practice. We must therefore inform ourselves in depth on the past and present work of this said agent. We have to be careful not to sign a contract with just any record label. We have to surround ourselves with people of experience. Before signing a contract, it is advisable to have

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it verified by a jurist. Personally, I have strong beliefs and this comes across in my music. I believe in a superior Being, in other words, God. This helps me in my choices and in my career. I credit my success to the Great Master, who gives me the serenity and the energy I need. My spirituality allows me to be in harmony with myself and with the people around me. This regenerates me.

I would also add, as other advice, that if we want a lasting career, we must be prudent and vigilant when it comes to the projects we decide to associate ourselves with as artists. I would also add that it is important for young singers to write about what they know, and not try to imitate others for the sake of notoriety. Besides, it can always be sensed when someone tries to imitate someone else. Without being preachy, I believe that we must associate ourselves to quality projects, and to not sell our souls. We must be in our element and not adopt a style which does not work for us; besides, the public will not be convinced and will sense the duplicity.

As artists, we have a team which surrounds us and of which we must be conscious. This necessitates excellent coordination, communication and commitment toward the people involved in the production of an album or of a show, for instance. The artist must therefore learn to deal with all these individuals.

I also believe that it is important to enlarge one's horizons by being ready to go everywhere. For instance, I've been to Morocco and the Caribbean, among other places. I enjoy discovering other peoples. It is an excellent way to make oneself known. I would also tell young people that they need to find themselves a manager who is able to reassure and support them, and help them in making connections between them and the public. This manager should be able to present a clear and precise career plan, with a timeline. It is important to surround oneself by an excellent team, which will help build a beautiful set for stage performances, for example.

We must have a wide vision when it comes to the field of entertainment. We can be authors, composers, managers, choreographers, artistic directors, events promoters, sound engineers, etc. It is up to each individual to see what is most interesting for them and to think about the field where most of their talents can be maximised. Each of these points will help provide a foundation for a solid career.

To conclude, I would summarise the qualities of a good artist in this way:

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Know how to draw lessons out of our journey, which gives the opportunity to increase our success rate. We learn by observing daily.

Set specific objectives and avoid scattering ourselves around.

Plan on developing a variety of skills; in other words, have an eclectic profile (for instance, learn how to lead a group of musicians, master a number of instruments, learn to read and compose music, etc.).

Be meticulous, diligent and punctual (be on time for rehearsals, for example).

Know how to work as part of a team, since there are many people who are part of the professional pathway of an artist in the production of an album or a show, for instance.

As an artist, learn to master stage presence, public speaking, image, communication with the public, stance, etc. Contact with others allows us to grow as artists.

Watch videos in order to improve stage presence, among other things. Interaction with the public is a very important aspect which we must master.

Stay on top of what is happening in the music industry and in the world. This way, we feed ourselves and it allows us to continually bring newness into the artistic domain.

P.T. Do you have a message for your fans who are reading this?

G. I would like them to know that their approval touches me deeply. In general, the public at

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large always plays an important role in the success of an event. I tremendously appreciate their support, their presence and their festive side. For example, it warms my heart to have sung for 200 000 people in France, in the Caribbean and in Morocco. It was also special for me to have sung at Club Soda and at the FrancoFolies festival in front of large crowds in Montreal. It is thanks to the fans that an artist exists. I have many memories of my fans in mind. I regularly check out their forum, Fresh Crew. I have very positive thoughts toward them. I draw from them their palpable intensity and warmth during my shows. This has brought me a lot as a person. I love meeting my fans. It stimulates my energy even more. For me, music allows me to share happiness with others and help them forget the problems of life. I appreciate having a public with no racial or cultural boundaries. I also appreciate the media, who has been a support to me.

Thank you Gage for this great interview!



Official Gage website: <http://www.gage.mu/>

Gage's album is available at www.amazon.ca

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llarqKU-21M>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kP-B0wp3buc>